



Office of Neighborhood Development - Reading, PA

Insights

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the Office of Neighborhood Development



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Who Are We?

In Reading, P.A., it is sometimes hard to imagine living in the picture-perfect communities so often shown on television; the kind of community where neighbors greet each other by name. They participate in neighborhood meetings. The kind where residents take such pride in their homes that they cannot bear to let a day go by without pouring a bucket of steaming hot, soapy water and sweeping out in front of their hard-earned property. Neighbors look out for the overall cleanliness and safety of the entire area, scolding the otherwise well-behaved neighborhood children who forget their manners or litter well-kept sidewalks with candy wrappers. They also keep in touch with local police if need be.

For some older area residents, this is the Reading they knew; the Reading that still evokes a sense of nostalgia and a yearning for days gone by – Reading's golden years.

Reading Beautification Inc./the Office of Neighborhood Development is a non-profit organization and a city entity all in one dedicated to the residents, workers and visitors of the City of Reading, sharing the vision older residents have of the past and using it to mold the future.

Through an innovative and proactive educational emphasis, RBI/OND promotes community participation and projects that build and reinforce behavior that respects our environment and our community. RBI/OND is committed to neighborhood development through graffiti removal, litter elimination, waste minimization, recycling, environmental education, and neighborhood organization.

They, and many others, agree that one of the things that make it possible for neighborhoods like the ones Reading once knew to exist lies in the strength of neighborhood groups. That is why, despite all that RBI/OND does, supporting neighborhood groups remains at the top of its list of priorities.

"The organization's main objective is really the neighborhood groups," explains former RBI/OND Administrative Assistant Lisa Mehle, "Keeping up with them and making them grow stronger." One of the organization's goals is to make all of the groups "active." This means making sure that the groups have regularly scheduled meetings and consistent membership.

The neighborhood groups face many challenges including low meeting attendance and inactive membership.

"We are really trying hard to keep those involved motivated to stay involved," says Wayne Cockrell, RBI/OND's Executive Director. In fact, to show its support and recognize the very hard-working members of these groups, RBI/OND organized a banquet held on Tuesday, September 19th at the GoggleWorks. It also provided an opportunity for groups to get to know one-another and share ideas.

Other RBI/OND programs include the Great American Clean-Up, an annual event that enlists the help of numerous volunteers to clean up different areas of the city. We are also the local sponsors of the Group Workcamps project, which will bring hundreds of young people to reading in late June to complete minor home repairs for many city residents. RBI/OND is also looking for city residents to participate in the Citizen's Codes Inspection Program, a joint effort between the OND and the codes department.

Another major focus of the organization is graffiti. Former RBI/OND staff member, Tito Rivera, headed up a project that tried to motivate "good graffiti" with positive messages being spray-painted in various city locations that tend to attract "bad graffiti" filled with vulgar language and negative messages. We hope that by eliminating some of these, we may, in turn, eliminate some of the same tendencies in the actions of city residents and provide a positive picture of the future.

The legacy of the City of Reading as a once-great hub of entertainment, culture, and industry means that there is much to live up to when planning for its future. RBI/OND takes on that challenge with open arms and great expectations.

Some Young City Residents Write a Valuable Message to their Neighbors and Friends on A wall during The Great American Cleanup. "Help Keep Clean, Do Your Part!" the Wall Reads.



***From the Desk of:**
A Message from
RBI/OND
Executive Director
C. Wayne Cockrell

- **Calendar**
- **Great American Cleanup 2007**

From the Desk of:

RBI/OND Executive Director

C. Wayne Cockrell

You are reading our first newsletter from the Office of Neighborhood Development. This has been in the making for over a year, but we didn't have the "right" people in place before now. Now we do! Crystal Edwards has been, and will continue to be, the editor and coordinator of "Insights". She will be finding information that will be useful to you.

We certainly want to use this communication tool to recognize the accomplishments and achievements of all of you, but in truth, most of you want something that can help you rebuild your neighborhoods. To that end we will begin to provide you with information that should be of use to you. Crystal and the rest of our staff will be contacting each of you to find out what has worked for you, talking to City Hall and other organizations to find out what is happening that affects each of us, and researching the Internet and other sources to find what other leaders such as yourselves are doing to make positive changes.

We still have a ways to go to get where we want to be, but expect to receive this electronically in the future. We want to assist everyone that needs assistance in getting connected to the Internet. I know that some of you are uncomfortable, even skeptical, about the "net", but it sure makes communicating immediate, quick, and complete.

In 2007 there will be many changes affecting our neighborhood organizations. In particular, I would like for us to assist each other in being, as the U.S. Army used to say, "The best you can be"! The OND will work with each NO to determine what they specifically need to move ahead in their approach to improving their neighborhoods.

No, we didn't strike gold, nor did the City open its checkbook to us. We have, however, been established as a City of Reading department which will allow us more funding opportunities and more access than ever to the key people and resources.

We won't change our approach as advocates for neighborhoods even if it means "butting heads" with City Hall or Council on occasion. Our mission is to positively change neighborhoods in the city by working through you and other organizations.

Sincerely,

C. Wayne Cockrell
Executive Director
Reading Beautification Inc./
Office of Neighborhood Development

RBI/OND Calendar of Events

- **Council of Neighborhoods Meeting - Tuesday, March 20th, 2007 at 6:30p.m. at GoggleWorks.**
- **14th Annual Great American Cleanup – Saturday, April 21st, 2007, 8a.m.-12 noon.**
- **Earth Day – Sunday April 22nd at Centre Park.**
- **Group Workcamps Foundation coming to Reading June 24th-30th 2007.**

The 14th Annual Great American Cleanup



Lemon Street Before and After 2006 GAC

Whether you live, work, and worship in the city or just visit Reading from time to time, you will undoubtedly take great joy in helping to clean it up during the 14th annual Great American Cleanup on Saturday, April 21st, 2007.

Each year thousands of people gather to participate in this great day of community commitment. Bring your friends, family, coworkers, and congregation members and choose a spot to clean up. Choose from your street, playground, workplace, school, or favorite social area. We will supply the cleanup materials; you supply the committed and caring attitude!

The day will begin with registration and light refreshments at Reading Area Community College's Yocum Library at 8 a.m. and last until 12 noon. All participants will be eligible to participate in raffles for great prizes, which will be presented at the end of the event.

Reading Beautification Inc./ the Office of Neighborhood Development is an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, organizers of Annual Great American Cleanups nationwide.

We are still looking for sponsors and volunteers to participate in this meaningful communal event. Show you care by contacting our office at (610) 655-6277, and support our efforts by registering yourself or a group to help with cleanup or become a sponsor.

- **Group Workcamps are Coming!**
- **One Way to be a Good Neighbor.**
- **Fun Fact**

Group Workcamps Foundation Repairs Reading Homes



Along with the summer heat, the week of June 24th – 30th, will bring hundreds of teenagers from all across the country to the city of Reading with one common goal, improving the lives of others.

Teenagers and adult sponsors from the Group Workcamps Foundation will be coming to Reading and attempting to make a difference by repairing homes for elderly,

low-income, and disabled residents. During their weeklong visit, about 80 homes will have improvements made to them. Among the work to be done are constructing of wheelchair ramps and porches, interior and exterior painting, weatherization, and other minor home repairs. Five young people with the supervision of at least one adult leader will do the work at each home.

The Group Workcamps Foundation is an organization that recruits an average of about 400 teen and adult participants from the Christian-faith community each year. RBI/OND will be working with the foundation to prepare for the arrival of the volunteers.

RBI/OND will be working with the foundation to prepare for the arrival of the volunteers. We are currently in the process of distributing and collecting more applications from city residents who would like to have some work done on their home. We are reviewing applications and visiting each home to evaluate the labor necessary to complete work.

Volunteers with some knowledge and experience in construction and home reparation are still needed to assist with the evaluation process. We are also still accepting applications, and evaluations will be done on a first-come first-serve basis. To apply or volunteer please contact RBI/OND at (610) 655-6277 or (610) 655-6611, and speak to any one of our staff members.

10 Ways to Be a Good Neighbor: #1

1 Get to Know Your Neighbors.

So you just moved to a new neighborhood, and you're not feeling quite comfortable. You fear that the cold stares coming from the unfamiliar faces of people who now live across the street and next door to you are a result of disapproval of your intrusion into a perfectly happy community. You start to panic. Oh no... What should you do next?

Just smile and say hello, you worry wart! What better first impression can you make on your new neighbors than to be friendly and greet them? Upon meeting your neighbors, you potentially gain a new friend and someone to borrow eggs and sugar from in the event that you suddenly run out.

Don't stop there. Keep the momentum going by always greeting them in passing and taking every opportunity to learn something about the people in your community. Don't become Secret Agent 007 or anything, but there are some things you should know about your neighbors!

For instance, you may want to know that Miss Marla from down the street is 85 years old, lives all alone, and has trouble taking her, often very few, bags of garbage to the curb on trash collection day. Perhaps you could help her with that. You could even help her shovel snow and rake leaves if you want to be a really good neighbor and a good citizen. (And of course you want to!) Or, you may want to find out who in your neighborhood has kids the same age as your own so that you can set up playdates.

Even if it seems that you have nothing in common with your neighbors, a neighborhood is an important community in every person's life. In order to make it strong, each member must make an effort to get to know one another.

(Look For Other ways to be a good neighbor and improve your neighborhood in each publication of "Insights")

Reading Fun Fact:

Did you know that Reading, P.A. was the setting for a famous novel written by a Pulitzer Prize-Winning Author from Shillington?

Yep, that's right! Rabbit, Run, written in 1960 by John Updike is about a man who runs away from his family.

Updike calls the city "Brewer," a reference to Reading's past as a city famous for brewing beer and other beverages.

It was turned into a movie starring James Caan in 1970.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066274/>

Spotlight On: Centre Park Historic District Neighborhood Group

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- **Centre Park;
Exceeding
Expectations**

Though she considers her lawn a mere tiny patch of grass, Nigel Walker, an active member of the Centre Park Historic District neighborhood organization, often takes nearly two hours mowing her lawn. She cannot help, but become preoccupied with chatting up her tight-knit community of neighbors each time she leaves her home. On any given day, you may even hear her yelling out of her front door, across the street to ask to borrow some butter from her neighbors, who happily lend it to her.

What makes Walker's neighborhood such a utopia of amiability and sharing? Most, especially the members of Centre Park, would say it is the neighborhood organization itself, which strives to be all-inclusive in its exceptionally diverse community.

Tackling quality of life issues in addition to educating residents on City ordinances, and promoting architectural preservation to enhance neighborhood living is quite a task for any neighborhood group to handle. However, Centre Park Historic District has been practicing just that for the last 25 years. Some might even say they have almost mastered this art exemplifying and exceeding the expectations of what a neighborhood organization is supposed to be. Though their group has been going strong for a long time, they continue to implement new programs and activities which strengthen their organization.

One of those programs is the Block Captains program, which began in November of 2003. It is made up of about 20 people who are very involved in the improvement of their neighborhoods, and particularly their own blocks. "The program just gives people who are already eager to do things the tools to do so," explains Walker.

While the program has been instrumental in really pinpointing and solving problems disturbing the quality of life between neighbors, it serves a much more important purpose in terms of the overall setup of the organization. It provides a chance for growth through one-on-one contact between neighborhood group members and other residents. "Sometimes people just need to be invited personally," says Block Captain Co-Chair Jean Cacuzza.

Another personal touch the group gives is providing people who just moved in with welcome packets. Newcomers are able to use the packet as a resource guide for just about anything. "Welcome packets not only get new neighbors

involved in the Centre Park neighborhood organization, they let them know about where they live," explains Walker.

Included in the packets along with Centre Park Historic District Neighborhood Organization brochures and events calendars are city trash collection schedules, a neighborhood resource guide, emergency safety booklets, and brochures for local religious and recreational services.

While this group has always had great success, members cannot help but anticipate even bigger things for the future. "We just hope for continued growth; gaining more members and more Block Captains," says Barbara Waller, President of Centre Park Historic District Neighborhood Organization, "We will keep changing. Nothing is stagnant."

Among changes Waller feels are necessary in order to promote growth is new leadership. "New people bring fresh perspectives and new ideas," she asserts.

It is evident that there are a number of neighborhood organizations in the City of Reading that struggle as a whole due to lack of interest from the community, lack of resources, and a variety of other factors. The advice Waller would give to other neighborhood groups includes not being afraid of new leadership (as long as its good leadership) and having a well-constructed plan. She states it simply, "Limit, plan, and focus."

Walker agrees adding the importance of not being discouraged and pushing ahead, despite initial seemingly low interest from the community. "You have to accept the fact that one flyer and one meeting is not enough to make a neighborhood organization successful. You just have to keep plugging away," she says.

For more information on the Centre Park Historic District Neighborhood Organization, visit their website, www.centrepark.org



- **Should there be one Quality of Life Court in Reading? Get the facts.**
- **A Lesson in Volume Control.**



Quality of Life: A One-Courtroom Issue?

Every Council of Neighborhoods meeting serves as an open forum within which to discuss endless possibilities for the City of Reading and how to improve its neighborhoods. However, the meeting held in November was of particular significance to Reading Beautification and the Office of Neighborhood Development because it offers a simpler solution to one area of neighborhood disputes – codes enforcement.

In recent years, the numerous District Justice offices in Reading have become flooded with what are described as "quality of life issues." These issues range anywhere from complaints about abandoned vehicles and property neglect to graffiti and trash problems. To remedy the problem of overcrowding in local District Justice offices, some city officials have proposed the creation of one "environmental court" that would deal with all quality of life issues within the City of Reading.

"I was born & raised in this city and I care very passionately about it," says Judge Grimm, one of the meeting's keynote speakers. He also noted the importance of controlling quality of life destroyers such as neighborhood blight. "There is no doubt in my mind that the Broken Windows Theory that came into existence so long ago is alive and well within the City of Reading today, and we need to find a way to deal with it." He states, "The court has a legitimate responsibility to deal with these (quality of life) issues."

Indeed, the City has felt responsible for taking care of such issues and has tried a number of things to help deal with them. Besides the implementation of an environmental court, one recent proposal for fighting codes violators that abate the quality of life for many deserving city residents is the Citizens Codes Inspection Program. The program calls for city residents, ideally Neighborhood Organization Leaders, to become trained in what constitutes a codes violation. After an 8 to 10 hour long training session, they may become qualified to write violation "notices" to individuals who breach codes.

"It's Reading Beautification Inc./Office of Neighborhood Development and codes working together to be the eyes and ears of neighborhoods for quality of life issues," explains Wayne Cockrell, Executive Director of RBI/OND. The design of the program is similar to that of the "Friendly Neighborhood Reminder Program" that was in existence a few years ago.

The Formation of the Citizens Codes Inspection Program would, no doubt, lead to even heavier caseloads for local District Justices with the surfacing of more city residents who are not up to code. This makes the possibility of an environmental court very appealing to many city residents and District Justices alike.

That is why Judge Grimm has asked the Magisterial Committee to carefully study whether or not it would make sense to have an environmental "quality of life court." Some of the things he envisions the court dealing with are Public Intoxication, Public Urination, Prostitution, Properties in Violation of Codes, Property damage, Noise, Graffiti, Broken Windows, Disrespectful Youth/ Youth in Violation of Curfew, etc.

One of the disadvantages to having just one court that deals with quality of life issues is that there will only be one judge. Hence, there will only be one location for the court, making it a possible inconvenience for many people to get to.

However this is a considerably minor disadvantage according to Judge Grimm who claims that the city can and must create a system that is a little more user-friendly. Grimm states, "There is no cookie-cutter way of solving anything. It is the creative juices that flow from neighborhood groups that are going to create a solution."

10 Ways to Be a Good Neighbor: #2

2: Be Respectful of Your Neighbors.

Among many other things, this means keeping noise volumes down. Remember, what is music to one's ears can be described as an annoying and unnecessary noise to another's.

Music lovers of all ages, take your neighbors into consideration before deciding to blast those ever so sweet, bass-booming, tunes from your car or home. It could particularly become a nuisance to elderly neighbors, and those who have young children.

It is also important to remember that not everyone works from 9a.m. until 5 p.m., so making an excessive amount of noise at any time in the day could be disturbing anyone's sleep.



- **Meet today's youth, tomorrow's leader.**

Edited By:
Crystal Edwards

Keep in touch!

Reading Beautification, Inc./
Office of Neighborhood
Development
11th & Pike Recreation Center
Reading, PA 19604
Mailing Address:
815 Washington Street
Reading, PA 19601
Phone: 610-655-6277
Fax: 610-655-6031
wayne.cockrell@readingpa.org

Spotlight On: RBI/OND's Youth Leader of Tomorrow, Carolina Tejada

Well-mannered, polite, exceptionally well-spoken, and usually dressed in a blazer giving her a mature professional look, Lourdes Carolina Tejada is undoubtedly a natural-born leader. The founder of a youth group called "Generation of Change," and a full-time college student; at the age of 19, her achievements and ambitions rival those of most twice her age.

The daughter of two preachers – upon hearing her speak for one minute, one would not be surprised to hear that Tejada is blessed with an oration skill that comes partly from a gene-pool of well-practiced public speakers. However, one would be sorely mistaken to attribute all of her promising characteristics to having preachers for parents.

Most of what makes Tejada who she is comes straight from a source within, her heart. When asked what characteristic she thinks is most important for a leader to have, Tejada says, "Most importantly a leader must have a heart for the community. They must really care and want to help and assist others to rise along with him or herself."

That is perhaps the reason that though she is a native of the Dominican Republic, having been born in Santo Domingo and only living in Reading for the past six years, Tejada has dedicated her life to serving the youth of Reading, Pa., first and foremost.

"It is my belief that if one has the knowledge to make a difference in the world, but does not use it, he or she is just as bad as those who work to destroy it," she declares. With a self-confidence to rival those of some of the nation's top leaders, Tejada is sure to share what she knows every opportunity she gets. She says, "I'm a young person

and it pains me to see my generation withering when I am blooming, just because I have opportunities and open doors that others do not have."

As Executive Director of Generation of Change, Tejada envisions "bringing about a transformation to the youth of cities starting with Reading," according to the group's missions statement. The group plans to tackle long-term problems with this generation's youth through assisting in the overall "restoration of generations which are perceived to be hurt and unable to amount to greatness by enriching youth spiritually, emotionally, educationally, and socially."

The perception of a hurt generation, is what Tejada believes is the biggest and most problematic misconception facing our generation. "People in general see our generation as one without goals and a vision, a generation that will make our nation worse off," she explains. "I believe that this generation can be reached and saved and in doing so, save this nation."

To insure that Generation of Change is able to go national in the near future, Tejada is currently in the process of completing paperwork to officially make the organization an identifiable non-profit entity.

For now though, Tejada is content with helping the youth of Reading realize their potential. "This city has so much to offer, and people are starting to realize it. I want to be part of that revival," she says.

As for her plans for the future, Tejada does not have any plans to take it easy or slow down for a while. She sees herself as Mayor of Reading in the very near future, and envisions Generation of Change as a *worldwide* establishment.

